For Love and Liberty
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For Love and Liberty

by xpityx

Summary

The journey seemed to be endless, but Jack arrived in London after two days on the road and then caught a Hackney to the townhouse that Lizzie had given as her address, her letter in his pocket and fear heavy in his heart.

Notes

Er, you're going to need to read the first part of this first :)

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

He'd been handed the letter from a boy from the *Sultan Berenghemi*, which had hailed them as they made their way out of Rabat and into the open sea. Elizabeth had probably sent copies to Nassau, Tortuga and then all the ports in North Africa, being the clever lass she was. Letters were rare out on the seas, but difficult was not a thing that had ever deterred Mrs Turner.

It was obviously a run on from a second letter, and for a full minute Jack could not make head nor tail of it: it was recognisable as Lizzie's hand, but smudged beyond sense in some parts.

Ice ran through him as he sussed the meaning.

He walked calmly from his quarters to the deck, steady despite the rough sea.

"All hands! All hands!" he shouted, startling the men closest to him. "Make sail nor-nor-west, 40 degrees, cut the aft cable and hoist the jib!"

Joshamee, caught unawares, started to repeat his orders only half way though.

At an average five knots, they were ten days from Southampton and then it was a two day coach to London. He had a Letter of Marque and Reprisal that just needed a little altering and Dutch colours that would most likely hold their water for a day, giving him enough time to disembark and the Pearl to sail back into French territory. It was a little riskier that he'd like, but it was all he had at short notice.

Two pages of carefully-worded pleas Lizzie had written, but five words were all she had needed: *James is to be executed.*

~

He'd misjudged the Commodore at first. An error that could've been fatal - that *should've* been fatal - as Jack lived by his wits alone.

Steady, Jamie had said, hands gentle on a thieving pirate as he'd bent to help Jack drink. *Steady,* he'd said, and Jack had known then and there that he'd never have anything to fear from this man: that Lizzie, clever Lizzie, had been right to trust him. *A good man*, she'd said, and Jack, blind Jack, had thought she'd meant 'a Navy man, an *Englishman'*. No; a good man he was, under the polish of civilization, and now he was going to die.

Jack kicked his heavy desk chair in frustration, but it did nothing 'cept cause his foot to ache and make him feel foolish. As if he needed any aid in that direction.

He'd been thinking for a while that they couldn't continue as they were, that Jack's famous luck would run out and he'd be caught sneaking either in or out of Port Royal. Jamie had not gotten there yet though, still tied by the chains of his god and his country, and perhaps he still thought that what was between them was something he could give up one day. So Jack had thought *next time*, and then again, *the next time,* and now that might be a time that will never come. Damn Jack for being too cowardly to ask Jamie with him, and damn again him for not stealing him anyway. Better to be hated and for Jamie to be alive and sailing.

"Mr Gibbs!" he hollered, and his First Mate came in promptly as if he'd been waiting outside Jack's quarters.

"Get me some rum," he demanded.

"Jack, if you just told me what was happening I'd…."

Jack looked up, and something in his face must've told Joshamee that this wasn't the time.

"Right you are Captain," he finished, and left to do as he was bid.

Well, not quite, Jack noted sourly as Anamaria returned with his request. The Black Pearl's Quartermaster slammed the rum onto his desk with enough force for Jack to make a half start towards the jug, worried for the safety of its contents.

"And why are we running towards enemy waters with a hull full of stolen goods?" she inquired, in a tone that said Jack better answer and it better be an answer she liked. Why did he insist on surrounding himself with terrifying women?

“Jack!”

She lifted the jug and slammed it down onto the desk again as he hesitated too long with his reply.

“The Commodore,” he started then paused, at a loss.

Anamaria sighed and poured them both a measure of rum.

“I heard he’s a Captain now, same as you,” she said, nursing her drink.

Jack flicked his eyes up to her and nodded.

“I’ll fetch the Letter of Marque and tell the crew. We sailing for England?”

Jack nodded again, feeling a little wrong-footed: he’d expected more shouting and slamming. Anamaria was not a women to hide her disapproval.

She finished her drink then got up to leave.

“We’ll bring him back,” she said, laying a hand on Jack’s shoulder as she passed.

Ah, he remembered now: terrifying *and* terrifyingly competent.

~

All his dark skinned crew knew better than to stay on deck as they sailed into the English port. He’d lost a man once that way, the British quick to decide who was owned and who was not. Someone had once made the same mistake with Anamaria, though she’d been much easier to locate: he’d just followed the sound of men begging for their lives.

His papers named him as ‘Mr Michel’, and he was dressed well enough to be welcomed to

Southampton with a respectful nod from the Dockmaster. With her Dutch colours the Black Pearl was given barely a glance in the bustling port, and she slipped quietly away into the dusk as Jack made his way into the town proper. He bought passage to London on a stagecoach which had probably been new some fifty years before, and there were holes in the roads so wide they could've comfortably hidden three barrels of rum and a dead horse. Coupled with the age of the coach, Jack was heartily regretting not stealing a horse and risking a run in with a highwayman or two.

The journey seemed to be endless, but he arrived in London after two days on the road and then caught a Hackney to the townhouse that Lizzie had given as her address, her letter in his pocket and fear heavy in his heart.

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"He is sick, it is the only reason he is still alive: he became unwell on the crossing."

Lizzie had barely greeted Jack or dismissed the servants before she had launched into an account of the most recent events.

"You must get to him before they decide to shoot him anyway. He's under house arrest at Lord Grove's residence, let me get you the keys. I have gotten one to the outer garden door and another to the kitchens, and also I have made a note of the rotation of the guards. I have petitioned Parliament for clemency, but they will not let me speak for him of course…"

She stopped her flow of words and she turned back to Jack, who probably looked about as flabbergasted as he felt.

"You have copies of the keys?" he asked, just to make sure his ears were not passing him some false hope.

Elizabeth seemed to draw herself up in such a way that one forgot about the heavy skirts around her waist and the lack of sword at her hip, "Have you forgotten who I am?" she demanded, all riotous fury.

Jack grinned, "I only forgot for a while, it's the rum you see."

Then he swept a low bow, allowing the depth of his gratitude to show on his face: “Forgive me, your majesty, King of Pirates, Queen of Thieves.”

The King nodded her head regally, and then she was Lizzie again: worried over the fate of a good friend. She turned to fetch the keys and note in question and then handed them to Jack, who was still a little stunned at their existence.

Will came in then, bringing a draft of London damp with him. “Jack!” he exclaimed, hurrying forward to embrace him. Jack staggered a little with the force of the manly slap on the back that accompanied all of Will’s greetings. He then kissed his wife who looked at him expectantly. “He is no better,” Will dutifully reported, “though they wouldn't allow me in to see him. I saw Lord Groves briefly on my way out, who said James was most unwell but he still held hope for a King’s pardon.”

“No, if they were going to pardon him they would have done so already, they mean to have him shot for thinking of his men rather than his *duty*.” Lizzie turned to Jack, the force of her pleading eyes as likely to send him staggering as her husband’s greeting. “Please Jack, I know it is at great risk that you came here, but he saved your life once, you said so yourself, surely you owe him the same?”

Jack shifted, uncomfortable. Folk could be odd about where a man stuck his cock or where a woman stuck her fingers and tongue. It was also not his place to tell the Turners just what lay between him and Jamie, but he did not much like to lie to his friends.

“I owe Jamie more than I can tell you,” he said, honestly, then winced a little as he saw Lizzie catch the nickname, but she merely nodded and looked back at her husband.

Will smiled a little. “Stay for dinner, Jack, you won’t be able to do much in the daylight anyhow.”

Jack shook his head, the thought of being here whilst Jamie was under lock and key was too much, but equally not something he could explain to well enough to the the Turners.

“I’ll just go have myself a look-see,” he tried.

“Jack, you need a plan. Stay a while and we will think of something together.”

“I have a plan, get the Commodore away from those who’d reward his loyalty with a bullet!” His voice had got away from him a wee bit at the end, and Lizzie looked shocked at his outburst. Even young Will had raised his eyebrows up to his hairline. Jack looked away, a little embarrassed. “Look here,” he said, keeping a sharper hold on his temper, “you said it yourself Lizzie: he’s a good man, he saved my skin more than the once and he deserves better than this.”

Lizzie nodded, determined again, and looked to her husband. Some silent communication must have passed between them in that look, as Will then went over to the dresser and drew out a tied purse that looked heavy enough to make the thief in Jack sit up and take notice. These were his friends though, and he only ever needed to ask to be granted what little he needed: be it a bed for the night or an audience for his stories. Now was no different of course: Will handed him the purse filled with clinking coins.

“This is the last of my inheritance, I... we...” Lizzie glanced at Will, who looked at her with the same steady love he always had, “we want you to use it to make sure that James gets to safety.”

Jack took the purse and secreted it away in an inner pocket before bowing theatrically, “as my King commands.” It was clear that Lizzie could see through his theatrics to the fear that tightened his throat, but she was gracious enough to let him pretend.

“Send word, when he is well again,” she said, brave to the last.

Jack nodded his thanks and left.

~

Even dressed as he was, Jack could think of nothing that would allow him to walk unremarked into Grosvenor Square. The mews at the back were another matter however, and it didn’t take much to slip among the horses and up into the loft of the closest stables. The mews were not as well crafted as the fine houses they served, no architect wanting to put his name to the place where horses stood and shat, therefore the lofts above ran into one another so Jack had almost the full run of the Square. He softly made his way through the dusty space until he came to the back of the great house of Lord Grove, where he settled in to wait for dusk.

Lieutenant Commander Theodore Groves he remembered well enough: a Navy man through and through that one. Hadn’t seemed to have much in the way of blue blood though, just the delusions of grandeur that most men in uniform had, so he must’ve married well. Jack didn’t have any of that though: delusions or blue blood neither. Groves had done Jamie a good turn by offering his home for house arrest, and had given Jack an equal boon, as otherwise the Commodore would’ve been in

the Tower of London and there would've been no hope of escape from that fortress. Jack would've got in, no doubt, had thought about such an outcome on the mad dash from Africa to Southampton, but the only way that was ending was with both of them before the firing squad. Perhaps he'd even made his peace with the idea, so Lizzie's keys and Lord Grove's charity had been all the more a shock for it. This was it though, this was all the chance he would get, Groves would be giving no quarter to a pirate and not risking his reputation enough to let Jamie go, otherwise he would've surrendered his ward to Lizzie already. It was just him, his luck, and all the chances that the Pirate King had provided him.

It was all he needed, he thought, as he stepped lightly into the evening dusk.

The back windows shone dimly with candlelight through the heavy drapes, but the garden was still as Jack made his way up to the back of the house. The top floor would be servant quarters, beds shoved under the drafty eaves, but the second floor would be bed chambers with the master bedroom most likely towards the front of the house, far away from the smell of the stables. To Jack, a climb up the outer wall was nothing: the stones did not sway in the wind and there was no heaving sea to toss him into the depths. He was neither battered by rain nor in danger of being struck by lightning. A pleasant time, he would almost call it, if he were not at risk of being spotted at any time from the stables behind him.

Up and through an open window, where he crouched in the darkness. Over the sound of his heartbeat he could hear faint conversation and movement from the floors below, but nothing from this one. He opened the bedroom door to a dim, wide hallway, with a carpet so thick he could've cartwheeled down the hall and those below be none the wiser.

Not the next room or the next, but the fourth bedchamber he tried was occupied: the bed held a sleeping figure and a low lamp beside it. Jack walked softly to the bedside, and there was his Jamie, as white and waxen as a corpse.

For a second he could not understand what his eyes were seeing, but then despair clawed him down to his knees and he rested with his head by his lover's side.

~

Sick, Jamie was sick. Jack had known from Lizzie's first letter, had even blessed the sickness for keeping him from being blindfolded and shot in the courtyard of Newgate prison. But this wasn't just sick, this was near death: thin and almost ghostly, air rasped unevenly from his blue-tinged lips. Gods above and below, how was he going to get him out of the house? How was he going to get him on a horse?

Jack allowed himself to lose half a minute to surrender, then he was up and searching the room for medicines Jamie would need and clothes he would put him in. Once he'd gathered what he could carry, he made sure Jamie was dressed warmly and heaved him over his shoulders. He found himself thinking that he was like a dead weight, then told himself he wasn't allowed to think any more dark thoughts until they were both of them safely on the Pearl. Then he could drink his rum and wallow all he liked.

Suitably fortified, he made his way down the hall and then down the main staircase that swept through the middle of the house: it looked as if he was taking the risky route after all.

Jack had carried men and women both dead and alive over his shoulders in his life, but fuck it was a hard day's work. He rested for a second in a well appointed hall to catch his breath, when a door to his right opened and a man stepped into the room.

Lord Grove had put on a little weight and he'd had a significant improvement in his wardrobe since the last time he'd seen him. Jack thought the weight suited him more than the fancy clothes, but on reflection now was probably not the time to mention it.

He settled Jamie a little more securely across his shoulders but made no other move nor sound: there was nothing he could say and no-where he could run, even if he'd been prepared to leave Jamie behind.

Lord Grove stared for longer than Jack could stand, before inclining his head so slightly that he almost missed the movement in the half light.

Jack swallowed down the fear of being shot in the back and turned, careful not to jostle Jamie, and walked across the open space to the scullery door and then through to the kitchens. Behind him he heard the sound of a door opening and closing, but nothing more.

~

He'd borrowed a little 26 foot sloop from her drunken master for the journey, leaving a note to say she'd be found a little way from the Port of Calais in a day or two. She'd had an insipid name, something like *Half Moon*, which Jack immediately changed to *Lizzie's Revenge* in his head and celebrated by pissing over the side of the boat once they were out of sight of land. The ride from London to Dover had not been a pleasant one. Jamie had remained stubbornly unconscious, even when some idiot with a rusty sword and a broken pistol had tried to hold them up at the Canterbury turnpike.

Jack looked down to where he lay across the bottom of the boat, wrapped in sheets and a horse blanket. He'd have to get some water into him soon, to say nothing of food. Better to take him back to North Africa, they had a better grasp of what ails you there, and a few more friendly ports to choose from. If Jamie survived the trip, of course. *Better not think like that*, Jack thought, *it be bad for Captain Sparrow's morale to think like that.*

The crew wouldn't be too pleased with the plan, but Lizzie had given him enough coin to make sure that they saw sense, and Anamaria would take care of the Pearl if they needed to stay ashore for a stretch.

"Some rescue this is, eh Lizzie?" Jack said, addressing the boat.

She was as silent as Jamie though, so he took up the oars and began to row.

Chapter 2

James dreamed.

Strange dreams of a dark sea and a small boat, lit by a single candle in the night. He dreamt he was underwater, and each breath bought a heave of seawater into his lungs, but no air and no release.

And Jack, always Jack. Jack laughing and grinning, telling tales and drinking rum. And dying, dying in a hundred ways in a hundred agonies. He was beheaded and stabbed, shot, drowned and hanged. Each time the grief was a sharp pain that pierced his chest and tightened like a band until he could not breathe for the agony. He was helpless to do naught but watch him die, watch him fade away in the Turners' house, bleeding from four lash wounds that would not heal.

Then he was awake. He thought perhaps that this was not the first time he had woken, but he had no real memory of any time before now. In fact, he did not know where he was, or even *when* he was. He had been in Port Royal and there had been a problem with the grain store… No, that was months ago. He had been at sea, there had been a fever and the Commodore had succumbed so he'd stepped into his place… To do what though? It was a blank, and thirst swept away all other concerns for the moment. He turned his head with great difficulty: he was in small but rather messy bed chamber. Something familiar about the room tugged at him, but more importantly there was a jug of water on a table close by. With great effort he struggled upright. He had no earthly clue why he felt so weak, but perhaps it was simply the thirst, and the water not two feet away from him would cure him of all his ills. He staggered over to the table, feeling as if he were fighting a heaving deck with every step.

The water was cool and clean though, and he drained first one glass and then another. Though as he went to catch his breath he immediately started to cough, and once he had started he could not seem to stop. He lowered himself gracelessly to his knees, trying to catch his breath between the terrible wet, tearing cough that fought its way out of him.

Black crowded the edge of his vision and he was gone again, back to the little boat on the dark sea.

~

The next time awareness found him, he lay once again on the bed he had last awoken in this strangely familiar room. He studied the details in a half daze: the papers on the table and the clothes strewn on the floor, a haphazard pile of books by the bed that threatened to fall over at any

moment and take a handsomely bound copy of *Meditations* with it.

And someone behind him, he realised, breathing deeply in sleep.

James laboriously turned himself over in the bed and found himself nose to nose with Jack: Jack Sparrow, his lover, his friend, who had of course come for him. Stolen him away from the death sentence that had been delivered by a quietly upset Theodore, as he lay ravaged by a sickness that sought to take the Admiralty's right to meet out punishment away from them. Punishment for trying to do best by his men, for trying and failing to be what Jack and Elizabeth and William all proclaimed him to be: a moral man.

Lord in Heaven, *Jack.*

James reached out to press two fingers to his warm neck, to feel the breath that fluttered in his throat. Jack murmured a little at the contact, and awakened by degrees. He could see the exact moment that Jack realised that James was awake: he lit up, and James knew then that all that was good and true was here, in this small space between their breaths.

“Jamie?” he asked, his voice rough with sleep.

James moved closer until Jack was a blur before his eyes, “I’m here,” he replied, “I’m here.”

~

They were in the Republic of Salé, James learnt, some twenty miles inland from Rabat, and he had been mostly unconscious for some 20 days. He had woken to eat a little and drink, Jack said, but he had no memory of it, save for his ill-fated attempt to cross the room alone the night before last. He had been a little alarmed at the realisation of exactly where they were in North Africa, but Jack assured him that they were in no danger from Berber slavers there.

He got stronger by degrees, and each time he awoke he noticed something new about his surroundings: the dry heat of the air that meant he was always thirsty; the strange call in the evening that Jack said was to tell the Mussulmen who worked in the surrounding fields that it was time to pray; the pale stone of the walls and the cool tile of the floors; and Jack, always Jack: reading or eating or snoring beside him. When James asked about the Pearl, all Jack would say was that she was safe and she would wait for them.

More than once James woke from a nap to find Jack a little worse for wear and trying to hide it. That Jack was capable of being any kind of nurse at all was a surprise, so he did not begrudge Jack his occasional forays into either the village or a rum bottle. He marvelled each time he awoke and Jack was still there. It seemed Jack was always coming to James, to his rooms, to his ship, to his bed, to his aid. That Jack should stay by his side, not knowing what James had done, how he had failed: it was like a great weight on his chest pinning him to this bed, to this sick room in this strange country. He had been cleared of the charge of cowardice at least, but he could find no evidence of such within him now: each time he thought to tell Jack how he had earned his sentence his began to doubt himself. What if Jack was so disgusted that he left? What would he do in this country where he spoke not one word of the language, or had even the slightest understanding of the culture? So he waited, until he could wash unaided, until he could walk the length of the room without running out of breath, until, until, until.

Jack looked up from the minute notes he was making on a map of some sort, perhaps sensing James' turbulent thoughts.

"Jamie? You be needing of anything?"

"No, I'm fine," James replied, and once Jack had returned to his work he turned his back on the room and waited for sleep.

~

There was a balcony of a sort off the main chamber they had been sleeping and eating in, and now James stood at the low wall that prevented a short fall and a sudden stop. The thought made him queasy now, he hoped he would have faced such an end with his head held high, but he found himself more and more questioning the basic decency and strength that he had thought formed the basis of who he was.

"James?" Jack called, from inside their rooms.

"Out here," he replied, though he was not sure if he was fit for company.

"It's good to see you up and about, but have a heart and leave a note to say you haven't been taken by slavers or some such next time, eh?" James could hear the half jest in Jack's voice, but could not bring himself up out of his dark thoughts to respond in kind.

“Jamie?” Jack asked from a step or two behind him, concern colouring his voice.

“I was found guilty of ‘not doing my utmost against the enemy’, though I hear I was cleared of personal cowardice.” James tried to smile at that, but by the look on Jack’s face it may have been more of a grimace. Jack took half a step towards him, perhaps intent on giving comfort, but James wanted none, he just wanted it to be over: for Jack to know this last terrible thing about him.

It had been an impossible task from the first: engaging the Spanish at La Guaira should have been the responsibility of an Admiral or a Rear-Admiral. Instead it had been left to a mere Commodore, although in the short time he knew him James had found Commodore George Gordon to be an exemplary officer, one who was extremely well-liked by the men. There had been a vomiting sickness on the voyage, and the Commodore had ordered double rations of rum to the unwell which had raised their spirits and eased their discomfort. The gossip had been that he was not much respected by any back in Westminster, but it was plain to see why ordinary sailors thought so well of him.

James had always kept himself apart from the seamen that lived and worked in a world so far from his own, even on the close quarters of a ship. The manner in which they spoke, the jokes they told and in the way that some of them found comfort in each other was nothing that James himself could countenance, or had let himself countenance before Jack. Gordon had bought them closer still, these men whom he had previously ordered into battle, into death without a second thought.

They had come into sight of the walled city some two weeks after leaving Port Royal, having lost perhaps 60 men to the sickness, and the Commodore lay weak in his bed too ill to do more than sleep and suffer. James had looked at the walled city of La Guaira and could not do it. Who was he to condemn these men to death? What right did he have, to obey orders from bewigged gentlemen a three-week voyage away, who had could not fathom the hardships that they faced daily? Who thought that the men that served them, those who could not write their own name or knew their own age, that their souls were made of a lesser stuff that his or the other Officers’? If he had learnt anything from Jack, it was that it was not possible to be a wholly good man, but instead he could be a man who did good deeds.

He’d ordered them back and they had sailed into Anegada to replenish their stocks and wait for reinforcements, but before they could set sail again word had been received from England: James was to present himself in London to explain his actions.

“How many sailors were left to you, after the sickness?” Jack asked.

“A little more than two hundred souls.”

Jack nodded, “Seems a fair decision to me, throwing yourselves onto Spanish battlements would have done naught but dyed the beach red.”

James grappled with the relief that swept through him: he has not known until this moment that it was Jack's vindication that he sought, that the opinion of the Admiralty and Lord Grove, of all he had served with, were nothing in the face of Jack’s easy forgiveness.

“You don't think me a coward?” he couldn't help but ask.

“No,” Jack looked a little bewildered at the question. “No, Jamie, never.”

He turned away a little, towards the view, so he felt rather than saw Jack take two steps closer to him. Jack wrapped an arm around his waist and kissed his shoulder before turning him around in his arms.

“There’s no going back, is there?” James asked.

Jack looked stricken for a second, then stood up a little straighter. ‘No, not and keep your life.”

James nodded. It was as he had thought, he’d just needed to hear it said aloud.

Perhaps he could have this now, if Jack would let him stay. It had been unthinkable before, when they’d only had snatched hours of time together. Even if he’d wanted to, if he could have made himself do something so foolish as to seek out the Pearl, he would have had no way of discovering her whereabouts without bringing all of the might of the Navy to bear. He looked back to Jack, who was watching him uncertainly, and reached out to pull him into a kiss.

They slid to the floor, both suddenly desperate to affirm that they were alive and here with each other. It was over quickly, both of them too long without and James with barely the energy to stand, but he carried in him the peace from Jack’s forgiveness, and later let it bear him into an easy sleep.

~

They lay together in the half light of evening. James had made it to the local baths that day, which had been a revelation of intricate mosaics and cool, clean water. Jack had spoken some words of the strange, musical language to the other men in the baths and they had laughed at a story he'd told. James was tired by the excursion by the early evening though, and lay dozing as Jack read beside him.

"I missed this, I missed you," James said, exhaustion and the near dark of the room rendering him perhaps more honest than he would otherwise have been.

"I missed you too," Jack admitted, putting his book aside. "I thought I'd lost you more than once."

"No, I meant before. I missed you before: it was like an ache I could not acknowledge, even to myself. I don't think I had even known the depth of it. But to be here, with you for more than an stolen hour here or there, I am..." James struggled for a moment, and Jack waited, ever patient, "I am whole. You have cured me of my physical ills, and also of a pain I did not know I carried until now."

Jack lay down next to him and entwined their fingers together, bringing one up to his mouth to kiss it: a gesture so far away from what James expected from another man that he had to stir himself to listen when Jack began to speak.

"I know I can sleep soundly with you at my back, even with a pistol in your hand. I don't have riches or, at least, I don't have riches for long," Jack flashed the gold of his teeth at that, "but there ain't no higher treasure I can give you than my trust and, well, you always had that."

"Always?" James asked, greedy for all of Jack's secrets.

Jack huffed a laugh, a little embarrassed. "You held me up to drink, and," James almost held his breath, so rare was it to see his Jack struggle for words, "and you placed the back of your hand against me forehead to feel for the fever. I knew you would never turn on me then." Jack looked up at him through thick lashes, "that I could expect nothin' but kindness from your hands."

James had to blink a few times and look away from the honesty of Jack's words, a little shaken at their confessions. It was one thing to feel so deeply for another man but to say those words out loud, to give them weight and flesh, seemed more dangerous somehow.

"Can I stay with you?" he asked in a rush. He had not had the courage to ask before, not when he'd

still needed Jack's care, but now he was well enough to travel if needs be and he could not wait any longer to hear his answer. Jack was silent for a second, and James' heart beat double time into the quiet.

"What? You think I would throw you out? Leave you?" Jack reared up, looming over James and spitting each word like a hard pip. "I threw myself, my crew, my ship, my everything halfway across the world to get to you, even though I had no way to free you once I got there, I did it anyway and you think now I'll be done with you?"

James reached out, to do what he had no idea, to comfort him perhaps. But Jack was beyond comfort and he bodily pulled James up so that they sat facing each other, bedclothes twisted under and around them.

"I will never be done with you, Commodore, do you hear me? Never." And he kissed James savagely, his hands fisted into the front of James' nightclothes. James moaned and sought to pull Jack closer by the handfuls of naked skin within his grasp. Jack halted the kiss long enough to pull off James' nightwear and then start on his own breeches. He bit down on the tendon between James' neck and shoulder, then soothed the hurt with his tongue. James thrust against Jack's thigh, dizzy with need.

"It's OK, Jamie," Jack soothed, kissing down his neck, calm now the initial wave of anger had subsided, "I've got you, my love."

"Jack, please," James begged, they had fucked only the day before, but it was never enough, it would never be enough. Jack wrapped a strong hand around his leaking prick and pulled him off quickly and efficiently, James loud in his pleasure. Afterwards James tried to rouse himself and reached for Jack, but Jack rolled away from him towards the mess of his belongings on his side of the bed, and came back with a vial of oil. Instantly, James was wide awake again, and he answered the question Jack had not yet asked without hesitation.

"Yes, yes do it. I want you to have me."

"You sure? It'll be uncomfortable at first: we might wait till you're a little better."

James kissed him, "Yes, I'm sure, and I am well enough." He went to turn over, but Jack stopped him and instead showed him how to put a pillow under his hips. James blushed at the picture he must paint, even though it was full dark now with only the moon to witness them. Jack looked a little unsure as well, his head down so that all James could see was his outline and a cascade of dark hair.

Jack kissed him as he slowly prepared him for an act that was punishable by death in all civilised societies. James could not bring himself to care, not when Jack's fingers and tongue were anchoring them together, casting a spell that only the two of them could understand. Finally it was done, and Jack was pushing into him. It hurt, of course, but James had borne worse pain for smaller reward. Then Jack was as close to him as two people could get, entwined between his legs and panting with the effort to hold still, to let James adjust. When Jack did start to move it was simultaneously awkward and incredible.

"Next time, you going to fuck me," Jack said, lowly, and James felt himself harden at the thought, to think himself doing this to Jack, to be inside and above him: to be so trusted, so loved.

"Yes," he said, agreeing to this, to this life he would have chosen had it ever been a choice, "yes."

~

James was so nervous as they rowed out to meet the Pearl that not even the sight of Jack's taught muscles as he expertly handled the little boat could distract him. Perhaps 'terrified' was a more apt word, he reflected. He knew of course that many Navy men made their way down the well-worn path from privateer to pirate, but James had never had even the vaguest notion that he would ever be one of them. Even as it had become clear that Jack was more a fixture of his life than a passing phase of it, he had not thought of leaving his duty. Perhaps only now in this world he was here with this man, being rowed towards what some called freedom, and in every other he was alone on a dark endless sea. He was grateful for that though, and wished he was easy enough with his words that he could express his hopes and fears for his future to his lover. For their future. But for all that had changed he remained James Norrington, so he kept his thoughts to himself and straightened his spine against the rolling waves as Jack steered them straight and true.

Epilogue

“You’ll still not tell me where we are headed?”

“It's a surprise, love. Don't you trust me?” Jack looked amused rather than offended, which was always a bad sign in James’ book.

“To keep yourself and ours from mischief: no, not at all.”

Jack snorted, but would be drawn no further on the topic.

As Sailing Master, one would have thought that that Captain would see fit to inform him of their final destination, but not, apparently, when said Captain was named Jack Sparrow. James sighed heavily to himself, but kept his more obvious complaints to himself. No-one muttered about his winning his position on his knees any longer, at least not within his hearing they didn’t, but he still worried a little about his standing with the crew. His position had been hard won, and it had taken several weeks of sailing before he’d been up to full strength so he understood the crew’s initial lack of confidence in him, but he had proved able to keep up with their Captain’s more impracticable plans which he felt had endeared him to them somewhat. He was also, if he didn’t say so himself, a skilled navigator.

They were to sail 10 degrees south west, to a spot of sea that he would have bet a rather large sum of money to contain naught but more sea, but Jack was determined and the crew happy enough with their last haul to indulge their Captain. Which left James the unenviable task of attempting to talk some sense into Jack whilst remaining courteous enough as to not to undermine his ultimate authority. It was a difficult line to walk, and one that had caused the most altercations during their first few months at sea. It had been their ever-capable Quartermaster, Anamaria, who had finally taken him aside and calmly explained that she understood his frustration, but that arguing with the Captain in front of the crew was not helping anyone. He’d kept their more lively discussions to the Captain’s cabin from then on.

It was a beautiful day, the sun a few hours from her apex and a salty wind cool on his skin. A tiny spit of land swept an arc off the seaboard side and, against all odds, a shout of ‘sails’ went up as they neared the approximate point which Jack had directed him to. James squinted against the bright morning sun into the distance, until he realised that it was not a ship he should be looking for, but a much closer one-mast 20 or so footer that was coming up aft of the Pearl. He could only see glimpses of her past the main sails, but he could hear Jack well enough to know that he was ordering ropes thrown over for whoever the poor souls were.

James left his post to investigate further, now it was clear there was no Spanish warships or some such bearing down on them. As he reached the foremast, he could see two slim figures climb over the forward rail. However, they were not strangers rescued from the sea, but Elizabeth and William Turner, greeting the crew like long lost family.

He was astonished. He walked forward the last few feet and called out to his friends, “Elizabeth, William. What on earth are you doing here?”

Elizabeth laughed and William came forward to embrace him, his eyes shining with the same joy that sounded in his wife’s laughter. And of course there was Jack, stood on the foredeck and grinning at him, golden in the morning light.

James turned to Elizabeth again and she reached out to clasp his hand.

“It's time for another adventure, James.”

End Notes

Beta'ing was bought to you by SlumberousTrash and her irrational fear of the verb 'to have' in the past perfect.

I'm on Tumblr for incoherent fandom and anarchy;Twitter for writing updates; Website for original works.

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